

A Response to the Draft Anglican Covenant from the Standing Committee of The Diocese of Virginia

We recognize the challenging work undertaken by the Covenant Design Group and acknowledge the draft they have presented. We affirm that the Draft Anglican Covenant is intended for discussion by every Province of the Anglican Communion and is therefore a step in the larger and longer conversation of how we live out our union in Christ.

We affirm and celebrate that we already have a covenant initiated by our gracious God, unmerited, unearned and undeserved, as revealed to us in Holy Scripture. By the love and merit of the Son in his Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, we belong to God for ever. By the charism of the Holy Spirit, we are pledged to one another as members of the Body of Christ in bonds of love which no human action can dissolve. The covenant relationship we share with one another as a gift of the Triune God has been long expressed in the Nicene Creed and in the ancient baptismal confession of the Apostles' Creed.

We question whether a Covenant that arises out of a particular conflict and disagreement can serve to make us one, as Christ desires us to be. We fear that such a Covenant will lead to more conflict and division.

We recognize that the Instruments of Unity in the Anglican Communion have developed organically over time and that the interrelationships between the Instruments have been fluid and changeable. We oppose definitions and descriptions of the Instruments that limit them and prevent the emergence in the future of changes or of additional Instruments that reflect the broad riches of the Anglican Communion.

We particularly object to the clauses in the Draft Covenant that limit the authority of the Anglican Consultative Council, the only Instrument of Unity that includes lay people. We affirm that the full inclusion of the laity in decision making and leadership is a hallmark of The Episcopal Church and a particular charism of Anglicanism, and we object to any action that would diminish its vitality.

We also object to the disproportionate power given in the Draft Anglican Covenant to the Primates' Meeting and oppose efforts to establish any body akin to the Roman Catholic Curia. The establishment of such a body is profoundly contrary to the historic spirit of Anglicanism. We are deeply concerned that the Meeting of Primates has already assumed improper and unprecedented authority to adjudicate genuine theological disagreements and to dictate what actions Provinces may or may not take without regard to the synodical structures of the Provinces, as evidenced in their Dar es Salaam Communiqué.

We conclude that the Draft Anglican Covenant is profoundly impaired by its disregard for the deep theological grounds on which we already belong together, the ecclesial history of Anglicanism as a family of interdependent yet autonomous churches that are both episcopally led and synodically governed, and by a rush to end the current disagreements in which we find ourselves.